FORENSIC SPECIALTIES ACCREDITATION BOARD, Inc.
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Standards for Accrediting Forensic Specialty Certification Boards

1. Scope

This document outlines the standards to be applied by the Forensic Specialties Accreditation Board for the accreditation of programs that certify individuals practising a forensic science or other forensic specialty. The included standards address only the process by which such knowledge, skills and abilities are assessed, documented and maintained.

The Forensic Specialties Accreditation Board (FSAB) shall assume no liability to any persons, entities or organizations by reason of the adoption and implementation of the FSAB accreditation program.

All persons, entities and organizations are urged to make their own independent investigation and evaluation of any forensic certification body.

2. References

These materials were used as references during the development of these standards. Inclusion of a reference document, or lack thereof, in the following list is not intended to vest control or authority in those listed, or to suggest lack of importance for those not listed.

2.1 ISO Guide 58 (1993)

Calibration and testing laboratory accreditation systems - General requirements for operation and recognition

2.2 Draft ISO/IES 17024 (October 1998)

General requirements for certification bodies operating certification of personnel

2.3 ISO/IES 17024 (April 2003)

Conformity assessment - General requirements for certification bodies operating certification of personnel

2.4 ISO Guide 2 (1991)

General terms and their definitions concerning standardization and related activities

2.5 Draft ASTM Guide (E36.20 subcommittee on Certification/Registration) (1998)

Standard guide for establishing requirements for bodies operating certification systems for personnel

2.6 NCCA Standards (National Commission for Certifying Agencies) (1998)

NCCA standards for accreditation of national certification organizations

2.7 CESB Guidelines (Council of Engineering and Scientific Specialty Boards) (1991)

Guidelines for engineering and related specialty certification programs

3. Definitions

The following definitions are specific to this document:

3.1 *accreditation*: The procedure by which an authoritative body gives formal recognition that a body or person is competent to carry our specific tasks.

3.2 *applicant*: A person or body that seeks to obtain a license from a certification body.

3.3 *appraiser*: A person who monitors the work of a candidate on the job and conducts the performance appraisal component of the certification system.

3.4 *audit*: An assessment against standards.

3.5 *candidate*: An applicant who is eligible to take an examination.

3.6 *certification body*: Governmental or non-governmental body that administers a certification system and issues licences or certificates of competence.

3.7 *certificant*: Person who holds a current and valid certificate of competence.

3.8 *credentialing*: The process by which an individual's education, training and work experience is reviewed against a minimum standard.

3.9 *continued competency*: The process of ongoing learning, growth and professional development within a field of expertise.

3.10 *continuing education / training*: A formal or informal program of continued learning and growth within an individual's profession.

3.11 *examiner*: Person who conducts the performance examination component of a certification system.

3.12 *forensic specialty*: A recognized area of expertise which is being applied in a legal context.

3.13 g*randfathering:* Granting certification to an individual who has not been tested for knowledge and/or competence in the field approved by the body awarding certification.

3.14 *independent*: Having no vested interest in the outcome or the certification/accreditation activity documents.

3.16 *primary training*: Training required to establish initial competency in a forensic speciality.

3.16 *proctor*: The person who administers the written or practical examination component of a certification system.

3.17 *psychometrics*: Science and technology of mental measurement.

3.18 *public member*: Representative of the public at large and consumers of services provided by candidates or certificants, but not an immediate stakeholder or one who derives income directly from stakeholders.

3.19 *management system*: The organizational structure, responsibilities, procedures, processes and resources for implementing quality management.

3.20 *recertification*: The process whereby an individual previously certified in a forensic specialty, renews that certification after a defined period of time, after satisfying published criteria. Recertification may also be known as maintenance of certification.

3.21 *reliability* (examinations): Degree to which an examination provides a consistent measure of competency.

3.22 *stakeholders*: All parties with a direct interest in the use of a certification system, including candidates, certificants, employers, authorities and specifying entities.

3.23 *study guide*: Materials prepared by a certification body to acquaint applicants with test content and scope. Study Guides should include, at a minimum, any books or other published material from which test questions are taken; the test format, education, training and/or experience requirements and pass/fail criteria. Guides may include sample questions, scenarios or practice materials.

3.24 *validity* (examinations): Degree to which an examination measures those competencies it is designated to measure.

4. Certification Body

4.1 General Provisions

4.1.1 All mechanisms used by the certification body to evaluate the knowledge, skills and abilities of the applicants shall possess the attributes of reliability, validity, and non-discriminatory effect appropriate to their nature and application.

4.1.2 Certification bodies shall not require membership in any other professional organization for certification; nor shall they impose undue financial requirements for certification. The certification body shall not use procedures to impede or inhibit access to the certification process by the applicants, except as provided in this standard.

4.1.3 Successful completion of an approved training course may be a requirement of a certification scheme but recognition/approval of training courses by the certification body shall not compromise impartiality, or reduce the demands of the evaluation and certification requirements.

4.1.4 The criteria used to evaluate candidates for certification shall be only those published by the certification body. The criteria must be periodically updated consistent with changes in the discipline.

4.2 Organization

4.2.1 The certification body shall be a legally identifiable entity or part of such an entity.

4.2.2 The certification body shall be independent and impartial in all matters of certification. All decisions relating to certification shall be the responsibility of the certification body's governing board and shall not be subject to undue influence or approval by another body.

4.2.3 The certification body shall be structured as to give confidence to interested parties in its competence, impartiality and integrity.

4.2.4 The certification body shall use formal procedures for nominating members to its board. The current board members shall not nominate a majority of their successors.

4.2.5 The certification body shall have documentation outlining the committees or individuals responsible for each component of each certification program offered.

4.2.6 The certification body shall have sufficient financial and human resources to fulfill its mission.

4.2.7 The certification body shall ensure that any training or related activities conducted do not compromise the confidentiality, objectivity or impartiality of its certification program.

4.2.8 The certification body shall maintain documents and records in a secure manner.

4.2.9 The certification body shall have policies and procedures for the resolution of complaints, appeals and disputes.

4.2.10 The certification body shall maintain a management system appropriate for the number of applicants and certificants.

4.2.11 The certification body shall have polices and procedures that distinguish between the certification of persons and any other activities.

4.3 Subcontracting

4.3.1 If a subcontractor is used for any purpose, the subcontractor shall have no vested interest or other conflict with the task being performed.

4.3.2 If a subcontractor is used, a properly documented agreement covering the arrangement, including confidentiality and prevention of a conflict of interest, shall be drawn up. The decision on certification shall not be outsourced.

4.3.3 If a subcontractor is used, the certifying body is responsible for ensuring that the subcontractor performs the work in a manner consistent with these standards.

4.4 Policies and Procedures

4.4.1 The certification body shall establish a policies and procedures manual for the administration of its program.

4.4.2 The policies and procedures shall be fair, objective and non-discriminatory; and comply with all federal, state, and local laws.

4.4.3 The certification body shall define the methods and mechanisms to be used to evaluate the knowledge, skill and ability of candidates.

4.4.4 The policies and procedures manual shall address internal and external inquiries regarding the certification status of an individual.

4.5 Management System and Review

4.5.1 The nature and extent of the management system shall be outlined in a policies and procedures manual. This manual shall include at least the following:

4.5.1.1 A policy statement of the management of the certification body.

4.5.1.2 A description of the organizational structure of the certification body, including all positions and committees; and a brief description of the function and responsibilities of each position and committee.

4.5.1.3 The policies and procedures for conducting periodic audits of the certification program.

4.5.1.4 The policies and procedures for the issuance and revocation of certificates or related documents.

4.5.1.5 The policies and procedures for examining and certifying applicants.

4.5.1.6 The policies and procedures for processing appeals, complaints, inquiries, disputes, or information alleging adverse behavior or activities.

4.5.2 The certification body shall conduct a review or audit of its management system and records annually to ensure that they are complete and up to date.

4.5.3 The management system shall be the responsibility of a designated individual who reports to the highest level of management of the certification body.

4.6 Scope of Program and Available Documentation

4.6.1 The certifying body must have the scope of each certification program clearly defined and available to the public through a web site The site must include the following information:

4.6.1.1 A description of the organizational structure and legal status of the organization.

4.6.1.2 Purpose of the certification program.

4.6.1.3 An outline of the scope of the program to include the areas covered by the certification and the required knowledge, skills and abilities of applicants.

4.6.1.4 The minimum education, training and experience required of applicants

4.6.1.5 A description of the procedures used to test or evaluate the knowledge skills and abilities of the applicant

4.6.1.6 The standards and rules for granting, maintaining, suspending and revoking certificates.

Note: The description must be sufficiently detailed that a third party can readily determine how certificants were assessed and the minimum qualifications and experience they were required to have prior to certification being granted. If the standards have undergone substantive changes, a description of the changes must be listed and the date they became effective. For program changes that occurred several years ago for which detailed records may not be available, it is acceptable to list a chronology of changes with approximate dates.

4.6.1.7 Criteria used for the evaluation of any required training program(s) /course(s) and/or trainer(s).

4.6.1.8 The application form and an outline of the application process. The application must include a statement that the applicant agrees to comply with the requirements for certification.

4.6.1.9 A disclosure of any exceptions that may be made to the standards usually applied to certification of an individual and the rationale for that (e.g. waiver of a degree requirement).

4.6.1.10 A full description of the recertification procedure for certificants, including the minimum standards required and any alternate pathways for recertification (e.g. re-examination in lieu of sufficient continuing education requirements).

4.6.1.11 A description of restrictions or limitations on the use of the certification body's marks, and on ways of referring to the certificates granted.

4.6.1.12 A directory of certified individuals.

4.6.1.13 An outline of all substantive changes to the standards used to credential (evaluate), test and certify applicants.

4.6.2 Effective February 28, 2008, a description of the policies and procedures, and all program documents describing the certification standards of the certifying body must be archived indefinitely. The documents should include the date they became effective and the date they were superseded or became obsolete.

4.7 Examination and Other Records

4.7.1 The certification body shall maintain a record system appropriate to its particular circumstances. The records shall demonstrate that the certification requirements have been effectively fulfilled, particularly with respect to application forms, evaluation reports and other documents relating to granting, maintaining, renewing, suspending and withdrawing certification or any other changes to the scope of certification of an individual.

4.7.2 The records shall be identified, managed and disposed of in such a way as to ensure the integrity of the process and the confidentiality of the information. The records shall be kept for an appropriate period of time to

demonstrate continued confidence for at least one full certification cycle, or as required by recognition arrangements, contractual, legal or other obligations.

4.7.3 The certification body shall also maintain, as appropriate, the following records: date of the examination, the target forensic specialty, performance characteristics and examination outcome.

4.8. Confidentiality

4.8.1 The certification body shall safeguard confidentiality of the information obtained in the course of its activities, consistent with applicable laws. Individuals involved in the certification program must agree in writing to maintain confidentiality and to disclose any potential conflict of interest.

4.8.2 Except as described in these standards, information about a particular individual shall not be disclosed to a third party without the written consent of that individual. Where the law requires disclosure, the individual shall be notified of the information provided.

5. Certification Standards

5.1 General Provisions

5.1.1 Certificates shall be awarded only to applicants who meet or exceed the criteria set by the certification body. These criteria shall be applied uniformly to all applicants and candidates.

5.1.2 These criteria shall include at minimum appropriate credentials, successful examination completion, and agreement to abide by defined ethical and professional standards.

5.1.3 The certification body shall require periodic recertification.

5.1.4 Grandfathering is not an acceptable method of certification.

5.1.4.1 Certification bodies that used grand fathering and which were established prior to February 17, 2001, may apply for accreditation if not more than 50% of its certificants were grandfathered.

Note: An individual is considered "grandfathered" if the person was issued a certificate without having taken and attained a satisfactory score in an examination designed to assess the knowledge, skills and abilities in the stated field of certification.

5.1.4.1.1 Any grandfathered certificants must be subjected to the same examination and competency assessment as new applicants (as defined in 5.3 of these standards) no later than the regularly scheduled recertification for that individual, not to exceed a period of five years.

5.1.4.2 No certification body established after Feb 17, 2001, may apply for accreditation until all its certificates have been issued according to the standards as defined section 5.1.4 of these standards.

5.2 Credentialing

5.2.1 Credentialing of applicants shall include an assessment and verification of:

5.2.1.1 Academic education and/or equivalent training, including specific subject requirements.

5.2.1.2 Relevant professional experience or employment.

5.2.1.3 Sufficient relevant training to reach the competencies required for the specific field.

5.2.1.4 Relevant professional licensor, certification, or registration.

5.3 General Requirements for Initial Professional Development or Training in a Forensic Specialty Area

5.3.1 To the extent practical, training shall be documented, to include a description of the nature and extent of training undertaken, any assessment the trainee and outcome.

5.3.2 For forensic specialties that have a strong academic foundation as a basis on which training and experience is based, the required knowledge and competency may be gained through a combination of mechanisms to include course work, workshops, and training courses.

5.3.3 For forensic specialties where the required knowledge and competency is predominantly experience-based, this must be primarily gained through a formal training program that involves extensive peer-based review.

Note: A formal training program is one that has a pre-defined list of training topics and is conducted by one or more individuals with expertise in those areas. The nature of the training program, dates training occurred and the name of the individual who trained, should be available. For training that occurred many years ago for which such records are not available, there should be a list of the training that did occur and which is considered equivalent, even if it did not occur over a contiguous time period. The training should be verifiable. Correspondence and conference attendance are not recognized as primary training in the forensic specialties. For skill-based training, the identity and qualifications of the trainer should be documented.

5.3.4 At least 50% of the certificants of a certifying body must have met the requirements of section 5.3 at the time they apply for accreditation or re-accreditation.

5.3.5 Where nationally recognized professional training standards exist for a particular forensic specialty, these should be followed.

5.4. Competency and Examination

5.4.1 Competency shall be assessed, at least in part, by a reliable and valid examination of relevant discipline specific knowledge, skills and abilities.

Note: What is acceptable as "reliable and valid" will depend some extent on the potential size of the group subject to testing. It is recognized that

rigorous psychometric testing procedures may not be practical to apply to small groups. However, ever effort should be made to ensure that all testing procedures are fair and accurate and reflect current standards in the forensic specialty that are covered by the scope of the certification program.

5.4.2 The examination shall, at least in part, require the candidate to apply forensic expertise to some set of facts.

5.4.3 The examination shall include some written component.

5.4.4 Assessment of competency may also include, but is not limited to, proficiency testing, case audits, audit of court testimony, case presentations, appraisals, or an appropriate combination of these methods.

5.5 Ethics and Professional Standards

5.5.1 The application process shall include inquiry into the applicant's adherence to ethical and professional standards.

5.5.2 The certification process shall also require that the candidate agree in writing to abide by the ethical and professional standards identified by the certification body. These standards shall be documented and shall include the disciplinary procedures for any breach thereof.

6. Recertification

6.1 General Requirement

6.1.1 Only individuals who are currently certified are eligible for recertification. Recertification shall require successful demonstration of continuing competency, continuing education, work experience, and reaffirmation of ethical and professional standards.

6.2 Continuing Competency

6.2.1 A continuing competency program shall consist of one or more measurable components including, but not limited to, ongoing learning, growth and professional development within the certificant's field of expertise.

6.2.2 Measurement of continuing competency may include, but not be limited to, proficiency testing, case audits, relevant work experience, relevant publications, conducting training (paid or unpaid), audit of court testimony, case preparation and relevant work experience.

Note: FSAB Standards do not require a certificant to take an examination in order to be re-certified.

6.3 Continuing Education

6.3.1 Recertification shall require documentation of continuing education, the requirements for which shall be defined by the certification body.

6.3.2 The requirement for continuing education must include at least 40 hours or point equivalents over 5 years.

6.3.3 The program must allow credits for completing multiple types of activities.

6.4 Work Experience

6.4.1 Recertification shall require documentation of continued relevant work experience, the requirements for which shall be defined by the certification body.

6.5 Ethical and Professional Standards

6.5.1 Prior to recertification, certificants shall be provided with current versions of ethical and professional standards identified by the certification body.

Note: "ethics and professional standards" may be contained in one single or two separate documents.

6.5.2 Recertification shall require certificants to reaffirm in writing that they will continue to adhere to the ethical and professional standards identified by the certification body.

7. Competency Evaluation Personnel

7.1 Training and Instruction

7.1.1 Responsible individuals who have received training or instruction appropriate for the tasks they perform.

7.2 Conflicts of Interest

7.2.1 Proctors, examiners and appraisers shall avoid situations that might affect their objectivity, or appear to affect their objectivity, in performing the tasks they are assigned.

8. Competency Evaluation Methods

8.1 Examinations

8.1.1 Examinations shall be used to evaluate a candidate's knowledge, skill and ability in a valid and reliable fashion.

8.1.2 Examinations shall be revised periodically to maintain their currency.

8.1.3 Examinations shall be prepared by individuals who have sufficient knowledge, skill, ability and experience in the target forensic specialty.

8.1.4 Examinations shall encompass the knowledge, skill and ability required for competent practice within the target forensic specialty.

8.1.5 The methods used for scoring and grading examinations shall be methodologically sound.

8.1.6 Reasonable accommodation shall be made for candidates with an identified disability.

8.1.7 Examinations shall be administered in an area that provides the environmental and physical conditions, and security generally accepted as necessary for an examination (e.g. proctoring).

8.1.8 Where the length and complexity of a competency examination is such that traditional proctoring is not practical, other reasonable steps shall be taken to protect the integrity of the examination and that the candidate was the person who took the practical examination.

Note: One way to assist in determining whether the candidate was the person who performed the practical test is to administer an oral examination that includes questions about the way the competency examination was performed and the candidates understanding of the problem and the solution. Some certifying bodies may wish to obtain a notarized statement form the candidate to the effect that they performed the test unaided. If it is impractical to perform one or both of these verifications, accreditation of the certification may not be possible.

8.1.9 The certification body shall provide adequate security for examinations and examination questions. If it becomes apparent that integrity of the examination has been compromised, a different examination shall be offered.

8.1.10 Candidates who fail an examination shall not be re-examined immediately. The certifying body shall specify a mandatory minimum waiting period between examinations.

8.1.11 The certification body shall ensure that the decision on certification is made by individuals different from those who carried out the evaluation.

8.2 Performance Evaluation

8.2.1 Where performance evaluations are used, the same general principles that apply to section 8.1 in these standards shall apply.

9. Certificates

9.1 Issuance

9.1.1 Certificates shall be issued upon the successful completion of all requirements of the certification program. The certificate may take the form of a letter, card or other document, signed or authorized by a responsible officer of the certification body.

9.1.2 The certification body shall maintain sole ownership of the certificates.

Note: Individuals who retire and no longer can, or wish to, meet the standards required for re-certification may, at the discretion of the certifying body, be given some form of (retired status). However, such individuals may not be regarded as being “certified” by that body.

9.2 Contents

9.2.1 The certificate shall include at a minimum:

9.2.1.1 Name of the certification body or program.

9.2.1.2 Name of the certificant.

9.2.1.3 Certificate number.

9.2.1.4 Date issued.

9.2.1.5 Period of validity or expiration date.

9.2.1.6 Forensic specialty covered by the certificate.

9.3 Expiration

9.3.1 The certificate shall be valid for a period of no more than five years.

10. Changes in Certification Requirements

10.1 Notification

10.1.1 The certification body shall give reasonable notice to all certificants (and as practical, other interested parties) of any changes to its certification requirements, the exact nature of the changes, and their effective date.